

Education for Human Rights and Democracy: an IIAS-UNESCO Workshop

1995-2005 has been identified as the United Nations Decade on Human Rights Education. As a follow up to the Plan of Action formulated for this decade, the Institute, in collaboration with UNESCO organised a 3-day Workshop to discuss the Indian national experience in the field of education for human rights and democracy. The Workshop brought together nearly a score of experts academics, lawyers, human rights activists, educationists and administrators, who along with the Fellows of the Institute deliberated the status of education for human rights and democracy in both the formal and informal institutions to analyse present policies, strategies and programmes. A unique feature of the Workshop was the active participation of the Indian Army which has of late launched a major programme for sensitizing the personnel about Human Rights norms.

The Workshop was inaugurated by Justice Rangnath Mishra, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission. Justice Misra and Justice P.C. Balakrishnan pointed out that India has been an early signatory to various International Covenants on Human Rights. More importantly, our civilization embodies all the basic values and attitudes of tolerance for the other, compassion, freedom, equality and justice. Our nearly five decade long experience as a functioning multi-party democracy with vibrant state and non-state institutions the media, the judiciary, voluntary institutions give us a firm base on which to deepen and further build a durable regime of human rights and democracy. The setting up of the National Human Rights Commission is but the latest of the steps in this direction.

The Workshop was organised around eight panels which variously analysed the legal policies and frameworks for human rights education in India; human rights education at the primary, secondary and higher education levels; the rule of law and democracy; the role of the media both print and audio-visual. Special sessions were organised on themes such as Human Rights in the Army; Minorities and Human Rights Education and the philosophical presuppositions

behind education for democracy.

The inaugural session of the Workshop closed with remarks from Mr. Janusz Symonides, UNDSO Director for the Programme on Education for Human Rights and Democracy.

II

The participants expressed deep concern about the broad state of affairs in the country—the growing civil strife, riots, the growth of violent protest movements and the increasing inability of our formal institutions and structures of governance to cope with the tensions and demands in a satisfactory manner. The need to pass special laws, the creation of special courts, the need to call in the Armed Forces to maintain law and order are all signs of a fraying of our system. This, combined with an unequal and inequitable global order, the entry of new actors in our national arena, etc., has contributed to the growing strains, and a somewhat pessimistic outlook for the future of democracy in the country.

Various participants pointed out that the current state of affairs is due not only to a non-implementation by the State of the various laws and Constitutional provisions, but equally because of the complex nature of our civil society. Violations of rights after all occur in the arena of the family, kinship groups and communities, many of them marked by a less than adequate concern for individuals located at the wrong end of the power spectrum. The Workshop tried to evolve minimal criteria of civilized behaviour and conduct that could root themselves in our complex and diverse society.

Various participants questioned the very philosophical basis of rights, particularly as defined within a liberal framework. The assumption of universal norms was questioned. The issue of duties in relation to rights as claims was discussed. Then the difficult question of agencies which could ensure compliance. Within each of these cluster of issues, participants

identified core principles relevant to our societal and cultural context, and then assessed actual performance.

Coming more specifically to designing educational strategies to promote awareness of human rights norms and values as an essential part of developing a democratic culture the Workshop discussed the formal schemes adopted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development; the National Council for Educational Research and Training for the primary and secondary levels; and the University Grants Commission for higher education. Overall the feeling was that while we do have an elaborate framework and set of programmes much more needs to be done to infuse meaning into the context of such pedagogical exercises. Rather than introduce new courses on human rights, the consensus was on integrating these concerns on human rights, environment, gender justice, inter-religious tolerance, etc., in existing courses. The limitations of formal instruction, too, were pointed out. The discussion of the possibilities and limitations of the mass media were analysed. All felt that the values of human rights get internalised through a long and arduous process of continuous struggle. It is only then that the formal structures/courses acquire a meaning beyond the form.

III

Assessing the overall experience of both human rights and education for human rights and democracy is a complex task. There is little denying our progress on many fronts not just in maintaining democratic system, or the variety of state and non-state institutions that are engaged in the tasks of norm creation and implementation but in being able to substantially modulate many of the uglier features of our past. Nevertheless, for reasons analysed earlier, the system has come under increasing strain. Thus gaps between pronouncements and performance are increasingly apparent and expectedly a source of serious

concern. As earlier exemplified India fortunately has a variety of resources to fall upon in the task of consolidating and deepening its democratic experience. Regular elections, a relatively free press and judiciary, a clear separation of functions and powers between different agencies of the State, and above all a vigorous set of NGO's and social movements do provide a viable environment to facilitate newer programmes and exercises to promote values of human rights and democracy.

The dangers, and there are many, come not only from an overload on the system but also a proliferation of new issues and concerns, each of which demands recognition as a justiciable right. Shifts in the global environment too often create new pressures which our existing instrumentalities have still to properly grasp.

One healthy feature is that there is now a deeper recognition of these problems in all institutions and levels, exemplified for instance by the efforts of the Armed Forces to spread awareness of human rights. Further, our cultural heritage and the inculcation of norms of tolerance and 'doing one's duty' at the primary levels of social organisation too provide an opportunity to meaningfully situate newer concerns within our cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, all participants stressed that one should not infuse too much expectation in education as a magic wand, particularly formal education. It was also pointed out that this is a long process, a long duree before we can feel confident that we, as individuals, as members of different groupings, and as a society have worked out norms of co-living that would satisfy both our moral universe as also the international consensus on what constitutes civilized behaviour.

IV

The Workshop ended on a note of cautious optimism and was seen as an initiatory exercise to work through difficult issues so that the serious work of evolving creative and practically sustainable programmes to deepen this exercise can begin.

ACADEMIC EVENTS

PROBLEMS OF LIFE: FROM BIOLOGY TO RELIGION A SEARCH FOR A UNIFIED UNDERSTANDING

The Institute organised a multidisciplinary seminar on *Bio Social Dimensions of Ageing* from 13 to 15 November 1995 at Shimla, under the General Chairmanship of Professor J.S. Bajaj. About ten distinguished scholars from various fields presented papers and participated in the discussion. Welcoming the distinguished audience Mrinal Miri, Director of the Institute, explained the genesis of the idea of the present seminar out of the experience of a similar seminar on the "Problems of Poverty" held at Bombay. But the problems of old age are more universal and also pose much more challenging tasks at the methodological, theoretical and normative levels, which need a creative response.

The important thing, he felt, was to search for an integrated understanding which could bring together science and religion to focus upon the meaning and value of the terminal stages of life. Picking up the theme of the search for an integrated understanding, Professor J.S. Bajaj, in two fascinating presentations dwelt at length upon the intricacies of recent bio-chemistry and neuro-chemistry of the ageing process; he also dwelt upon the life enhancing wisdom of traditional cultural values and practices. L.S. Kothari gave a balanced research report on the wonder drug Melatonin; she cautioned against

medical euphoria in this regard; according to her, Melatonin is certainly a very important therapeutic agent, but as with all drugs, one must not expect the impossible from it. Achla Gupta continued the session on *biology of ageing* with a research report on the bio-markers of brain ageing.

The discussion on the psycho-social dimensions of ageing was opened by Paramjeet K. Dhillon who presented a paper on "Ageing and Intellectual Productivity" which was, in the main, a critique of some of the recent applications of IQ test to senior workers. Ashoka Prasad reviewed in fascinating detail the sociology and diagnostics of the psychiatric syndromes of late life.

A. Ramanamma, presented some of the sociological dimensions of the problem in her paper on "Women and Ageing". She disputed the methodological as well as policy framework of official reports on the problems and life chances of ageing women in Maharashtra. S.P. Bannerji talked generally about the religious understanding of ageing and death and S.C. Daniel, about the Christian perspective on Ageing and Death. Old age as a distinctive moral stage was the theme R. Sundara Rajan's presentation. The seminar ended on 15 November 1995, with a brief valedictory note of stocktaking by the Director of the Institute.

NONLINEARITIES IN COMPLEX SYSTEMS

A two-day intensive discussion on "Nonlinearities in Complex Systems" was held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla from 14-15 August 1995. It was jointly sponsored by the Institute and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Government of India. This conference was held in an informal, though highly professional, atmosphere.

Nonlinear effects play a ubiquitous and important role in all branches of the natural and social sciences. The dynamics of a system is usually described in terms of evolution equations for a few variables which characterise the system. Two simple examples: First, in a simple ecological system consisting of a prey and predator, the appropriate variables would be the time-dependent populations of these two species. Another example is that of an atmospheric system, which can be described (albeit at a highly simplistic level) by temperature, pressure and wind velocity variables. Because of the complicated nature of the interactions involved, the evolution equations for these variables are usually nonlinear. The meeting focused on the role of nonlinearities in complex systems, i.e., systems which are comprised of simple (possibly nonlinear) elements, which combine to give an extremely complex overall behaviour. Complex systems have come to play a crucial role in

computer science, physics, chemistry and biology and have been the subject of much recent research interest. Thus, terms like chaos, irreversibility, bifurcations, catastrophes, etc., have become a common denominator for seemingly unrelated phenomena in vastly different disciplines. The interdisciplinary nature of these problems results in a symbiotic interaction between researchers from different fields.

This meeting brought together an active group of scientists from diverse areas of physics and mathematics. The topics covered ranged from quantum stochastic phenomena, quantum hysteresis and self-organised criticality to phase ordering dynamics and pattern formation in spatially extended systems.

A special volume containing manuscripts based on talks delivered at the meeting will be published shortly, which will provide a flavour of this exciting field of interdisciplinary research. The distinguished participants included G. Ananthakrishna (Bangalore), R. Bausch (Germany), S. Dattagupta (New Delhi), P. Grassberger (Germany), J. Kertesz (Hungary), K. Krishan (Kalpakkam), H. Muller-Krumbhaar (Germany), S. Puri (New Delhi), R. Ramaswamy (New Delhi), K. Sinha (New Delhi), S. Thoma (Germany), L.A. Turski (Poland), I. Webman (Israel).

THE GALLERY OF PAST

The first phase of 'The Gallery of the Past' was inaugurated on 5 September 1995.

In its final form, the Gallery will provide a window to Rashtrapati Niwas' part as the Viceregal Lodge and to some of the momentous events that occurred here. The former Billiards' Room and Lounge have been earmarked for the Gallery and these rooms are being brought to their original character.

The items on display will include copies of documents and photographs relating to the freedom movement and the conferences that were held on these premises. Items of antique furniture, memorabilia and photographs of old Shimla will form a part of the display.

VISITING SCHOLARS (1.4.95 - 31.12.95)

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| 1. Professor N.Y. Reddy | "Educational Programmes for Physically Handicapped Children" |
| 2. Air Marshal C.V. Gole (Retd) | "National Security" |
| 3. Professor R.R. Mehrotra | "How to be Polite in Indian English" |
| 4. Shri Praful Bidwai | "India's Nuclear Option" |
| 5. Professor T.N. Pandey | "Native Americans in American Society" |
| 6. Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya | "Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore" |
| 7. Professor Ashoka Prasad | "Schopenhauer: A Psychoanalytic Perspective" |
| 8. Professor Rudolf Brandner | "The Situation of Philosophy Today" |
| 9. Professor John C.B. Webster | "Understandings of the Modern Dalit Movement" |

WEEKLY SEMINARS 1.4.95 31.12.95

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| 1. Dr. Ushakant Mehta | "The Existing Schools of Traditional Paintings (western India) in Relation with Glass Paintings" |
| 2. Prof. Graham Chapman | "The Improbability of International Stability and Harmony" |
| 3. Dr. Sucheta Mahajan | "Secular Praxis Vs Theorising Secularism: Gandhi in Noakhali" |
| 4. Dr. K.K. Shah | "The Woman as Source of Social Identity to Man (An Epigraphic Approach)" |
| 5. Prof. Randhir Singh | "Future of Socialism" |
| 6. Prof. K.Raghavendra Rao | "Indian Patriotism: A Counter-Discourse on Nationalism from the Periphery" |
| 7. Dr. Rama Puri | "Antarctica at Cross Roads" |
| 8. Prof. R. Sundara Rajan | "Language and the Political: Towards a New Understanding" |
| 9. Dr. Kumkum Yadav | "The Middle Class and the Distant Romance: The Tribal/Non-Tribal Interface in Arun Joshi's <i>The Strange Case of Billy Biswas</i> and Nirmal Verma's <i>Raat ka Reporter</i> " |
| 10. Prof. Udayon Misra | "Situating the NSCN and ULFA": Insurgency in North-East India |
| 11. Prof. K.C. Rauta | "Consciousness, Truth and Reality" |
| 12. Dr. Martin Kampchen | "Rabindranath Tagore and Hermann Keyserling: Accomplishments and Illusions of an East-West Discourse" |